

# ROTARY **Canada**

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## Peace offering

**A**S YOU ARE reading this issue of *Rotary Canada*, take a moment to thank Past District Governor Chris Offer.

Chris and his wife, Penny, of District 5040 in British Columbia, are two of the hardest-working Rotarians I have met during my years of service. (Like her husband, Penny is a past district governor.) You will read more about this dynamic couple in this issue. But first I want to highlight the fact that it was Chris who lobbied for a quarterly supplement to what was then *The Rotarian* to celebrate the activities and accomplishments of Canadian Rotarians and their clubs. Because Chris worked to establish this media platform, we owe our thanks to him for the rich stories shared in *Rotary Canada*.

As Canadians we sometimes behave smugly when it comes to issues of human rights, seeing ourselves as its recognized champions. While it is true that Canada has an enviable record of peacekeeping and peace-making, we do have much to answer for. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights, a national institution that opened in Winnipeg in 2014 (and is pictured on the cover beside the Esplanade Riel bridge), plays a leading role in reminding us what we still need to achieve to ensure an equitable peace within our own borders.

It is no surprise, then, as you will also learn in this issue, that Rotarians in Winnipeg helped launch the museum and continue to work with it and other groups and institutions on a wide variety of peace initiatives.

Is peace achievable? Rotarians believe it is, and they work toward achieving that goal every day.

### ROD THOMSON

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Courtesy of Chris Offer

### PHOTO OF THE MONTH

On a 2015 trip to India, Chris Offer administers drops of the polio vaccine to a baby about 100 kilometres north of Delhi. Read more about the Rotary adventures of Offer and his wife, Penny, on page 6.



FIELD NOTES

## A tonic for Hamilton's hungry

*True to its preferred name, an Ontario club is dedicated to making others feel good*

The name of the Rotary club on the western shore of Lake Ontario was meant to evoke a bracing after-five tonic, an invigorating elixir that was emphatically not an alcoholic cocktail. But somewhere along the way, things got shaken *and* stirred.

"When the club was originally founded in 2016, the word 'tonic' was part of our name," explains Joanna Turchin, executive secretary of the Rotary Club of Hamilton After Five, Ontario. "But for some reason it didn't register that way."

"Seriously, it didn't mean gin and tonic, as many believe," adds Cynthia Janzen, the club's current and founding president. "Rather, it was a tonic in terms of something that you take or do that is good for you and makes you feel good. That's the story behind our name."

As it happens, the story stuck, and today the club is informally known as "Tonic After Five." And the name fits, particularly in the face of a pandemic. "The unprecedented times we find ourselves in have increased the pressure on our social service agencies, first responders, and other frontline personnel," Larry Szpirglas told hamiltonnews.com last May when he was the Tonic club's president. "As a club we are committed to focusing our energies on helping the Hamilton community."

The club zeroed in on alleviating hunger. With a grant from the District 7090 Foundation Committee for a project related to COVID-19, it provided nonperishable food items to the Neighbour to Neighbour Centre, a Hamilton organization that addresses food insecurity and other community needs. (The club's donation to Neighbour to Neighbour was facilitated and augmented by a local branch of the Fortinos supermarket chain.)

"The addition of a large amount of nonperishable food items supplied by the Rotary Club of Hamilton After Five will make a needed difference to local families during the pandemic," said Charlotte Redekop-Young, the organization's manager of emergency food services.

"We need to get more Rotarians doing hands-on work."

— Joanna Turchin



Heryka Miranda of the Neighbour to Neighbour Centre displays some of the food donated by Hamilton After Five.

"We're making well over 100 home deliveries to families each month, and each donation helps."

In December, a new industrial refrigerator was installed in the community kitchen run by CityHousing Hamilton (a municipal agency that provides affordable housing) at First Place Hamilton, a residence for people 60 and older. The Tonic club provided 50 per cent of the funding for the appliance; the remainder came from a District 7090 grant. The refrigerator will provide storage for food prepared for First Place residents as well as for the newly created Seniors in the Kitchen (SINKS) program; created by CityHousing Hamilton and its partners, it will offer weekly workshops for seniors interested in learning new skills in the kitchen. The workshops will also provide participants an opportunity to build new relationships as they cook nutritious foods that they can share with family and friends.

Or at least that's the plan. Strict pandemic restrictions temporarily shut down the SINKS program, which was scheduled to begin in January, as well as its ancillary food market. (At press time, those restrictions remained in place.) CityHousing Hamilton continues to distribute food packages to First Place residents who need them, but in most cases, because of safety concerns, Rotarian volunteers are unable to help out.

That leaves Turchin and other Tonic members eager to get back to work. "Once the lockdown is lifted, Rotarians will be able to enter First Place and assist with the food distribution," she says. "We need to get more Rotarians doing hands-on work, but so far COVID-19 restrictions are holding us back. So unfortunately, at the moment, we play the waiting game."



FEATURE

# Winnipeg Rotarians celebrate peace

*An expanded Peace Days initiative brings people together from around the globe*

IT ALL STARTED in Winnipeg in 2010, recalls Rotarian David Newman, on a cold, wet, and windy 21 September: an hour of live folk music at midday on the International Day of Peace under a canopy at The Forks, a national historic site at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red rivers.

By 2019, this low-key event had blossomed into an annual 12-day peace festival, with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights serving as a backdrop and partner. But last year, with the threat of COVID-19 looming, Newman and his fellow organizers — including members of the peacebuilder committee of the Rotary Club of Winnipeg — came up with an alternate plan for Peace Days 2020: a collection of peace-related programs conducted over the internet that attracted a virtual audience that stretched beyond Manitoba to Bangladesh, South

Sudan, and other countries. It was a fitting accomplishment for an initiative that had its roots in the Rotary Club of Winnipeg, which 109 years ago became the first club outside the United States to join Rotary, making it (as members boast) the “club that made Rotary international.”

Peace activism in Winnipeg took hold in 2003 when Newman, an attorney and a member of the Winnipeg Rotary club, teamed up with the late Cam King, who was then a commissioner of the Canadian Red Cross and the governor-elect for District 5550 (Manitoba and parts of Ontario and Saskatchewan). The two men founded a group called World Peace Partners and volunteered their services to assist the Asper Foundation, a Winnipeg-based philanthropy, with its plans to build a human rights museum. “Cam and I came away from a meeting with the foundation and said that we would devote our lives

to fulfilling this idea of transformative education for young people involving the foundational human rights teachings at the [proposed] museum,” Newman says. “We were able to pull people together and, for example, get the local government on board by making a presentation on behalf of the museum.”

Al Jubitz, a Portland, Oregon, Rotarian who co-founded the Rotary Action Group for Peace, admires Newman — whom he calls “Mr. Peace Canada” — and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. “Winnipeg is the geographic centre of the continent, and that museum is a beacon to the world to think about, address, and promote human rights,” he says. “I hope everybody with children would visit that museum and ponder not only why it was created but what it represents. You will discover, as I did, that humanity is on a path toward diversity, equity, and inclusion, and that’s exciting to me.”

In 2015, the World Peace Partners, an endeavour now championed by District 5550, partnered with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights to launch an annual summer program called Rotary Adventure in Human Rights. High school students accepted into the program explore a range of social topics — such as Indigenous issues, gender equality, and democratic rights — under the guidance of a team that has included Rotary Peace Fellows. Newman praises Rob Tisdale (a member of the Rotary Club of Winnipeg) and Irwin Kumka (a member of the Rotary Club of Winnipeg West) for their administrative roles. He also singles out Tamara Larson, an educator and community consultant and member of the Rotary Club of Edmonton Whyte Avenue who travels from Alberta each year to chaperone the program’s participants.

In the past, the weeklong program had included events at the human rights museum, a day at an immigrant and refugee centre, another day at FortWhyte Alive (a 640-acre environmental and educational



**Peace sign**  
Participants secure the Peace Days banner at the 2019 event. Winnipeg Rotarians have provided Peace Days flags to other cities to raise in their communities.

Courtesy of David Newman





facility), and a tour of the Manitoba Legislative Building. The COVID-19 pandemic forced cancellation of last year's activities, but Newman hopes the program, which now attracts applicants from all over Canada, will resume this summer.

The Winnipeg Rotarians also cherish their affiliation with Honouring Indigenous Peoples (HIP), a national organization, founded in 2014 by Rotarians in southern Ontario, that encourages education, awareness of the history and culture of Indigenous peoples, and relationship building among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. "The lesson Rotary needs to learn is that diaspora groups don't come to you; you go to them," says Newman, who serves on the HIP board. "The same thing is true with Indigenous people. With HIP, we had our meetings in the heart of Indigenous communities. And we have done everything we could working with diaspora groups to go into their communities. That's how we build relationships."

Newman works in close cooperation with his wife, Brenda, a

member of the Rotary Satellite Club of Winnipeg; together they have contributed \$25,000 for Rotary's Peace Centers program. "Dave and Brenda exemplify how Rotarians can and do behave," Jubitz says. "Dave will pack a bag and go on a peace mission without hesitation."

Taiseer Shareif, a Sudanese woman who moved to Winnipeg in 2009, can speak firsthand of the impact made by Newman and Peace Days. "I was invited by a friend to attend a Peace Day event, not knowing it was a Rotary initiative," she recalls. "I met people from different backgrounds" — including members of the Rotary Club of Winnipeg's peacebuilding committee — "and the harmony between those people was amazing." Newman invited Shareif to a Rotary meeting, and she decided immediately to join the club. "The diversity I found, the kindness, the support, and the welcoming nature were overwhelming." In July 2022, Shareif will succeed Newman as chair of District 5550 World Peace Partners.

The peace initiatives undertaken by the Rotarians in Winni-

peg "are very inspiring," says Reem Ghunaim, executive director of the Rotary Action Group for Peace and a member of the Rotary Club of Portland. "Especially their support for Indigenous people, which aligns with one of Rotary's most impressive achievements: its involvement in the creation of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Rotarians in Winnipeg have set the standard for how Rotarians everywhere can be champions of human rights."

Energized by the changes necessitated by the pandemic, Peace Days no longer take place only in September but have been reimagined as a yearlong Peace Days 365. "We are eagerly embracing the opportunities of a renewed focus on digital events, as they provide a chance for individuals all across the world to participate," Shareif says.

This evolution, Newman explains, actually goes back a few years. "We wanted Peace Days not to be just a Winnipeg thing," he says. "We wanted people in Saskatoon and Regina to have their own Peace Days, and that started to happen." When Gimli, an Icelandic community on Lake Winnipeg, found it more convenient to stage its Peace Days in November, the event's temporal boundaries began to expand — as did another phenomenon.

"We had created a Peace Days flag that we raised in Winnipeg," Newman says. "We had many communities around Winnipeg that wanted to have Peace Days flag raisings of their own. So we provided flags for them to raise in their communities. The idea was, let's spread Peace Days out."

That impulse is indicative of Newman's way of thinking. "One thing I've unlearned as a lawyer and learned as a peacebuilder is that you can't force things or fix things," he says. "All you can do is provide a safe space for people to get to know each other and understand each other and hear each other's stories. Then you can begin moving forward and build relationships." — PAUL ENGLEMAN

**Harmony handshake**  
David and Brenda Newman (back row, right) smile as Al Jubitz (foreground, left) and other peace advocates clasp hands at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in 2016.



## PROFILE

# A journey of peace and love

**E**VEN AFTER 40 YEARS of marriage, Chris and Penny Offer are happy to relate the unique story of how they met.

“I tell people I met Penny in a convent, and she wasn’t a novice,” Chris says.

“It was an institution for delinquent girls in Winnipeg that was run by nuns,” Penny clarifies. “I was working there as a social worker, and Chris was a police officer from Vancouver who was visiting as part of a juvenile justice program.”

That was in 1979. Six months later, Penny moved to Vancouver. Fast-forward to 1998, when they opted to take early retirement, Chris from his job as a district police commander and Penny from her position as the administrator of a rehabilitation program for adolescents with spinal cord and brain injuries. “We didn’t actually retire,” Penny says. “We decided to redirect our lives.” The beneficiary of that decision was Rotary.

By then, Chris had been an active Rotarian for more than a decade

and was about to become governor of District 5040 (British Columbia). Having accompanied him on service projects and fundraisers, Penny decided to become a full-fledged member. She joined the Rotary Club of Burnaby-Deer Lake — and in 2010-11 served her own term as District 5040 governor. Today, she and her husband live about 15 kilometres south of Vancouver and are both members of the Rotary Club of Ladner.

But the Offers’ efforts for Rotary have extended well beyond British Columbia, with volunteer work in numerous countries, including China, India, Laos, and the Philippines. Penny has always been interested in basic education and literacy, and she has come to share her husband’s dedication to working for peace.

Chris says that his frequent exposure to violence while working in law enforcement reinforced a belief in the importance of peaceful conflict resolution that he had developed as a child. “My father was a World War II veteran, and

my mother was an English war bride who lived through the Blitz,” he says. “I grew up in a neighbourhood with a lot of veterans, and there was common talk about how awful war is.”

While he acknowledges that it may seem unusual for a police officer to be a peace activist, he explains that he always viewed his job as keeping the peace. “Being for peace doesn’t mean you’re against the military or law enforcement,” Chris says. “It’s an approach where force is the last thing you want to resort to.”

His three-year term as chair of the Rotary Peace Centers Major Gifts Initiative Committee ended last July, and he currently serves as vice chair of the Rotary Peace Centers Committee. Last year, he made dozens of online presentations to Rotary clubs about the Institute for Economics and Peace, a Rotary partner that measures and communicates the positive economic benefits that peace presents.

The Offers’ voluntarism has earned them numerous organizational recognitions, including a Service Above Self Award for Penny and a Rotary Foundation Distinguished Service Award for Chris. In 2012, their endowment to the Rotary Peace Centers led to their induction into the Arch Klumph Society. But the couple say it is the friendships they have made and the memories from the experiences they have shared that provide the greatest satisfaction, whether it’s administering polio vaccine drops to a 12-hour-old infant in a tiny shack in India or receiving a thank-you note, following a Rotaplast mission to China, from a little boy whose surgery for a cleft lip made it possible for him to go to school without other kids laughing at him.

“I wish all Rotarians could have some of the experiences that we had,” Penny says, recalling a trip to the Philippines when they met a group of boys reading American puzzle books in an effort to learn English. After the Offers returned home, they related this story at a local high school, and some students there organized a book drive and formed an Interact club. “The ripple effect of the work Rotary does can be amazing in small but significant ways,” she says. — PAUL ENGLEMAN

*“I wish all Rotarians could have some of the experiences that we have had,” says Penny Offer, shown above with her husband, Chris, on a 2018 visit to the Haida Gwaii islands in British Columbia.*



## NOTES DE TERRAIN

# La COVID-19 n'arrête le Club Rotary de Sainte-Foy

par Jacques Bossinotte, Club Rotary de Sainte-Foy

**L**E 13 MARS 2020, le monde entier est mis en confinement. Toutes les Rotariennes et Rotariens sont sous le choc et travaillent pour réinitialiser les activités de leur club. Fondé le 22 avril 1989, le Club Rotary de Sainte-Foy, un petit club (mais non moins dynamique), comptait 17 membres en début de pandémie. Par la suite, le club a perdu cinq membres. Alors, les membres du club retroussé leur manches pour aider la communauté.

Le Club Rotary de Sainte-Foy (région de Québec) a souligné ses 30 années d'existence au printemps 2019. Le club fait partie du District 7790 composé de 50 clubs. Depuis ses débuts, une longue liste d'organismes a profité de dons recueillis soit par des activités de levées de fonds, soit par l'intermédiaire du TéléBingo. Après 30 ans, le club a fait un don de 2 M \$.

En 2019, le club a reçu l'accréditation officielle de son Club Interact La Rochebelle, principal contact avec les différentes communautés culturelles et composé de jeunes de plusieurs communautés. Le club Interact est basé à l'École Secondaire La Rochebelle du secteur de Sainte-Foy (Québec) et à ses débuts (2019) comptait 24 jeunes et 2 accompagnatrices.

Grâce à son club Interact, très actif auprès des communautés multiculturelles, les Rotariens du Sainte-Foy avons connu un organisme nommé Ressource Espace Familles (REF) en septembre 2019 lors d'une fête du quartier Notre-Dame-de-Foy. Cet organisme a comme mission de soutenir les familles à revenu modeste des anciennes paroisses de Sainte-Foy et de leurs membres. De même, il gère le Comptoir alimentaire de Notre-Dame-de-Foy. Une demande de soutien financier à la Fête annuelle de quartier de Notre-Dame-de-Foy venant des jeunes Interact ayant

« Ce sont les yeux dans l'eau que la responsable a accueilli ce premier don de 5 000 \$. »

Le club a levé des fonds au printemps 2020 avec la vente de masques de protection.

été accepté en CA a permis de faire de cette journée un franc succès. Cette fête constitue un moment privilégié pour tisser des liens entre les citoyens et créer de la solidarité. L'implication du club dans cette activité leur a permis de connaître un grand nombre d'organismes et officiellement le REF. Pour les membres, se faire connaître en tant que club Rotary était devenu un objectif prioritaire.

Cependant, jusqu'en mars 2020, le club n'a plus eu de communication avec le REF. Son CA cherchait quel organisme aider. Un grand nombre d'organisations ont des besoins importants. Le club avait en banque des montants d'argent disponible grâce à des levées de fonds et des dons. Ils ont inclus: vente d'huile d'olives (automne 2019); vente de masques de protection (printemps 2020); vente de repas pour la Fête des Pères (printemps 2020); utilisation de l'argent promise au projet du président du club et à la Subvention du District; et obtention d'un don de 5 000 \$ de la Fondation SFL, où l'un des Rotariens était membre.

Début avril, une décision fût rapidement prise en CA, parce que le club venait d'avoir des informations sur le besoin qualifié d'urgent du REF. En effet, avant la pandémie, le nombre de familles inscrites étaient de 200 par mois; puis la COVID-19 est arrivé et en l'espace de quelques semaines, le nombre de familles a grimpé à 300 par semaine. La nécessité en bénévoles et argent s'est alors multiplié par 10.

« Le REF ne savait pas comment payer les factures de leur fournisseur principal, » a dit Michel Verret, président du club 2019-20. « Ce sont les yeux dans l'eau que la responsable a accueilli ce premier don de 5 000 \$. » Au total, le club a fait un don de 13 000 \$ à Ressource Espace Familles.

Mais la vie ne s'arrête pas là. Le Club Rotary de Sainte-Foy continuera de faire des levées de fonds pour aider le Comptoir alimentaire. Les besoins en bénévolat et en argent sont là et y resteront pour bien longtemps!



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